

THE CHALLENGE OF HAITI'S FUTURE

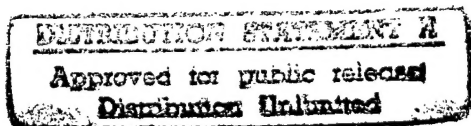
Report on Conference Sponsored by the

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by

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## FOREWORD

This Special Report contains an account of a conference on "The Challenge of Haiti's Future," sponsored by the U.S. Army War College, Georgetown University, and the Inter-American Dialogue, and held on February 10-11, 1997, on Capitol Hill, Washington, DC. The participants at the meeting addressed three broad issues: social and economic advance in Haiti, achieving democracy and the rule of law, and the role of the United States and the international community in Haiti. Conferees set forth numerous specific observations and policy recommendations. Recurring themes centered on the continuing need for almost universal reforms; the need to manage expectations among all actors, both Haitian and foreign; the need to assist Haitians to participate more effectively in political and economic decisionmaking processes; and the need for organized and integrated, long-term, outside involvement, and support for sustainable development.

Haiti's nascent and fragile democracy remains at risk. The United States and the international community have critical choices to make about the nature, extent, and longevity of their efforts in the country. On the one hand, the task of fostering a stable government, economic growth, and domestic security faces daunting obstacles, perhaps not ever fully amenable to foreign resolution. On the other, the cost of giving up includes the prospect of a breakdown of public order and possible reversion to the state of affairs that triggered intervention in the first place.

The conference report which follows makes clear just how difficult a problem the situation in Haiti poses for decisionmakers in and out of that country.

RICHARD H. WITHERSPOON  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## THE CHALLENGE OF HAITI'S FUTURE

He who dedicates himself to the dignity of mankind, and dedicates himself to the earth, reaps from it the harvest that sows its seed and sustains the world again and again.

Albert Camus,  
*The Rebel*

On February 10-11, 1997, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, the U.S. Army War College, Georgetown University, and the Inter-American Dialogue cosponsored a major conference on "The Challenge of Haiti's Future." The symposium was held 29 months after the September 1994 U.S./U.N. intervention to return the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, about a year after the peaceful presidential transition from Aristide to his chosen successor, Rene Preval, and only a few months before the scheduled departure of U.N. peacekeepers from Haiti in mid-1997. (That presence has since been extended through November.)

The speakers and panelists included an array of senior officials from the United States and Haiti, among them two U.S. Congressmen and a Senator, the Senior Director for Latin American Affairs on the National Security Council, the State Department's Special Coordinator for Haiti, the Director of Plans and Policy for the Atlantic Command, the Senior Staffer for Inter-American Affairs on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a former Haitian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, a former Haitian Justice Minister, a Haitian Senator, the Haitian Ambassador, and the former head of the United Nations Civilian Police (CivPol) operation in Haiti. Other participants included representatives from the U.S. Atlantic Command; the Departments of Defense, State, Commerce, and Treasury; international financial institutions, the intelligence community, congressional staff, private enterprise, think tanks, universities, and human rights and other nongovernmental organizations.

The bitter struggles over U.S. policy and Haitian political and socioeconomic issues that had marked the preceding years were fresh in everyone's minds. Yet, despite this history and the considerable differences of opinion that continued to separate many of the participants, the tone of the conference was forward-looking, with a minimum of polemics or blame-placing. The discussion generated an exceptionally productive exchange of information and ideas concerning Haiti's current problems and the prospects for both international and Haitian cooperation. In general, the discussions revolved around three recurring issues:

- Social and Economic Advance in Haiti;

- Democracy and the Rule of Law; and,
- The Role of the United States and the International Community in Haiti.

The following account captures the tone and substance of the discussions. Since there were significant differences among participants, however, it is not a consensus document. Where possible, we have indicated where conflicts of opinion occurred. Since the meeting was held on a not-for-attribution basis, speakers are not identified.

## PANEL I

### Social and Economic Advance in Haiti: What Will It Take?

There was broad agreement that even though the primary historical obstacle to socioeconomic development--the Predatory State and its military organization--is no more, the challenges remain enormous. Among other things, there are few functioning institutions, little human capital, and a long history of waste, corruption, and mistrust. Thus, the challenge is not one of "recovery" or "restoration," but rather of having to begin the development process virtually from scratch, with very little to build on. A few speakers argued that the macro-economic reforms promoted by the international community may lead to even greater inequalities and hardships. They suggested that these measures are likely to generate more socioeconomic and political conflict, undermine the legitimacy of the democratic government, and make sustainable development more difficult.

The panelists agreed that foreign aid is urgently needed, but also that it is important to avoid fostering dependency. Haitians must assume the primary responsibility for their country's development. Among other things, the Haitian government needs to:

- reaffirm its commitment to serious socioeconomic reform at every possible opportunity;
- constantly demonstrate a commitment to the establishment of a professional police force capable of providing a secure environment in which socioeconomic development can occur;
- revise or rewrite archaic laws, such as the 1827 Commercial Code, to encourage foreign and domestic investment;
- establish a competent and honest judicial system that can adjudicate the conflicts that will arise in a free-market economy;

- develop programs that will alleviate the crushing 70 percent unemployment rate while formalizing the informal economy and bringing it into the mainstream;

- train a competent and honest civil bureaucracy that can manage public enterprise, protect and improve the degraded environment, and help implement socioeconomic reform;

- generate the ways and means through which the Haitian educational and public health systems can develop a healthy, literate, skilled, and educated populace that can participate fully in the country's political, economic, and social modernization;

- enhance revenue-generation through the development and implementation of equitable taxation;

- decentralize socioeconomic development so that all Haitians can understand, participate in, and contribute to local, regional, and national decisionmaking processes;

- as a corollary, decentralize human and financial resources so they are shared at the local level;

- appropriately staff local agencies, while avoiding behavior that will foster clientelism, corruption, and favoritism;

- better manage the expectations of the Haitian people with regard to the fruits of democracy and a free-market economy so that there will be less societal friction in the development process;

- improve the national image in order to attract foreign investment and tourism; and

- enlist the support of the Haitian people, including the *diaspora*, along with the United States and the rest of the international community, to accomplish these ends.

All this, of course, is easier said than done. Many of the reforms advocated by the United States and international financial institutions (IFIs) are controversial in Haiti. All too often, the politicization of economic development there has caused the delay or stoppage of important projects. At the same time, ideological and political considerations have also played a role in the international community's behavior, leading to periodic interruptions of foreign aid which have severely impeded economic recovery.

Many participants emphasized a need for the developed

countries, and especially the IFIs, to be more flexible. They generally agreed that the United States and the other players of the international community must recognize that Haiti, like other Caribbean nations, has been hurt by NAFTA, which has diverted trade and investment away from the region. Accordingly, it was argued, Haiti's foreign friends should help remove barriers to international trade and investment, and assist the country in joining Caribbean and other global/regional economic groupings with a view to gradually substituting trade for aid.

Along these same lines, one of the Haitian speakers characterized the relations between Haiti and the IFIs as being very harsh. The IFI strategy, he said, did not recognize a basic fact of life--namely, that all countries are not at the same stage of development and have very different needs. The IFI strategy, he complained, does not recognize social costs. IFIs must take into greater account the desires and needs of the people affected by their policies. If not, those policies and the programs they engender will not solve Haiti's social problems, but only aggravate them.

In general, the participants accepted the need for the international community to adjust its preconceptions, strategies, and requirements to fit Haitian realities. It was suggested, for instance, that resources invested in human capital (education and public health), social safety nets, and job generation are crucial to stability, self-sufficiency, and long-term development. By the same token, the international community should seek consensus with its Haitian partners rather than impose requirements and solutions that rankle Haitian feelings of national sovereignty and dignity.

Finally, the speakers acknowledged that the current loosely coordinated, seemingly piecemeal, and *ad hoc* approach to socioeconomic development must change. Haiti's people and government, in conjunction with their international partners, were challenged to engage in a more cooperative, integrated, long-term planning and implementation process to achieve mutually beneficial ends. Unless the country's development problems are addressed on a more coherent and long-term basis, self-sustaining socioeconomic advancement will remain an elusive objective.

#### **The Discussion.**

Much of the discussion that followed the panel centered on the Haitian government's structural adjustment program. The panelists, all Haitian, offered a series of specific criticisms. One noted that there was no effective social safety net for those who were hurt by the program. Another commented that policies not accepted by the populace will not work. Still another observed that information and communication are crucial. He said



that the government had not adequately communicated its intentions and reasoning to the populace, and, if that is lacking, there will not be an adequate response. One panelist said that the Preval administration needed to signal strongly its commitment to reform. Instead, it had sent mixed signals. Some of those appointed to government posts are not committed to reform, while others don't have the necessary competence. A member of the audience noted that the structural adjustment program has had destructive as well as constructive effects. He cited its devastating impact on rice production. The imposition of new taxes, moreover, had hurt the ability of some legitimate businesses to survive and invest. Another participant indicated that aid for family planning had pretty much been cut off, and that deforestation efforts had been similarly affected. Only one or two million trees were being planted annually, a totally inadequate number considering Haiti's disastrous ecological situation. He also suggested that one way that the government could demonstrate its commitment to reform and rapidly enhance revenue was to privatize the customs service. This proposal fueled discussion and debate throughout the day.

## **PANEL II**

### **Achieving Democracy and the Rule of Law: Problems and Prospects**

All speakers agreed that, while some progress has been made, democratic consolidation and the rule of law have not been achieved. This is in part because priority has been given to immediate political, security, and economic stabilization requirements over longer-term needs. Those long-range needs, in turn, have remained highly vulnerable to political subversion, corruption, and popular alienation.

The panelists stressed that a failure to meet socioeconomic development goals and aspirations can suffocate political development. Part of the popular appeal of democracy lies in the expectation that it will lead to an improvement in personal well-being. Thus, economic growth and an improved quality of life are critical issues. If democracy and political stability are to be maintained, poverty, illiteracy, and disease must be alleviated, and increased opportunities for upward mobility provided.

This said, a failure to maintain law, order, and public security can also undermine democracy. Popular acceptance and support of Haiti's fragile democratic experiment has been based largely on the fact that it is credited with the demise of military repression and plunder. In addition, the Haitian people expected the new government to establish a peaceful and secure environment in which they could live and work without fear. Here a critical component has been the effort to create an apolitical professional police force sufficiently large and effective to



combat crime, violence, and abuses of power. Beyond this, however, the panelists emphasized two largely missing elements in the current situation--namely, the judicial and penal systems. Without functioning courts and prisons, they stressed, security would remain an illusion. And if democracy could not provide security, it would ultimately be discredited.

The panelists observed that, although the old Predatory State has been replaced by a more responsible and responsive government, deeply engrained popular notions of the state linger on. Most Haitians still view politics with considerable cynicism and distrust. While this is entirely understandable given their historical experience, it raises a critical issue: Can Haitians fundamentally change their political values, attitudes, and behavior? How and to what degree can the Haitian political culture be transformed? Only when the country's new political leaders and institutions achieve real reform, measurable socioeconomic development, and palpable security will inroads be made against deep-seated proclivities toward authoritarianism, demagoguery, corruption, distrust, and alienation.

The speakers made many recommendations, which taken together establish a basis for a holistic agenda for the achievement of responsive participatory democracy and the rule of law. In general, the Preval administration was urged to accelerate the reform process, while controlling government and police irregularities, and extending the presence of reformed institutions to the countryside where there is often no effective police or judicial presence. Recommendations emphasized the provision of benefits to Haiti's poor majority, who have been widely excluded in the past. Among specific measures proposed were the need to:

- introduce and implant international norms, including human rights, into the legal/judicial system;
- modernize antiquated and/or inadequate criminal, civil, labor, commercial, and family codes (some of which date back to the early 19th century);
- continue to strengthen and professionalize the Haitian National Police;
- give priority to the heretofore neglected task of creating an honest and competent judicial system;
- construct and upgrade physical conditions in the courts, police stations and prisons;
- develop a technically well-trained judicial police that can conduct professional criminal investigations, thereby freeing judges and magistrates from the burden of having to also serve as

investigators;

- continue and improve the programs at the Police Academy and School of Magistrates;

- professionalize the office of Inspector General of the Haitian National Police;

- confirm in law and the budgetary process the independence of the judicial branch of government;

- screen detainees awaiting trial and release those accused of relatively minor offenses not defined as infractions of the penal code (currently, the prisons are overflowing, with 80 percent of the inmates--and 94 percent in Port-au-Prince--being pre-trial detainees);

- introduce judicial reforms supporting more informal means of providing justice in commercial, labor, and family disputes;

- provide more education, information, and exchange of views between/among various elements of Haitian society, the Haitian government, and the international community in order to enhance understanding of the democratic process and the rule of law;

- institutionalize and regulate political parties and other organizations in order to promote democratic ideals, proper financing, accountability, and transparency; and,

- create a more comprehensive tax base that will provide the revenues that government needs to effectively govern.

Again, these recommendations, as with those made in the previous panel, are easier said than done. For example, there are enormous challenges in creating a professional police force in a country lacking any tradition of professional policing, where the function of the police historically was to serve as an arm of a predatory state. Deeply engrained attitudes and behavior patterns are not changed overnight. The Haitian National Police (HNP) received only 4 months' training; the most field experience any of them had at the time of the conference was 19 months. It takes years to develop a truly professional and competent police force and establish lasting trust between it and the populace it serves.

Compounding the challenge, there is a glaring lack of resources. One panelist pointed out that the 5,200 officers in the HNP are not nearly enough to cover effectively the entire country. As a result, numerous private security and para-police forces, often composed of untrained and unsupervised individuals prone to human rights abuses, have emerged. Thus, Haiti's

attache tradition continues in altered form. Yet, there are no resources to expand the HNP to a force capable of providing nationwide security. Indeed, there are questions as to whether even the current force can be maintained. Most of its funding comes from international sources, and no one knows what will happen when that money dries up.

In sum, meeting these challenges will require years of education, internalization, and institutionalization. If Haiti is to achieve the political development envisaged by the panelists, the country will need a great deal of help over a long period of time. This is not a crisis-management type of situation. Experience in Haiti and elsewhere suggests that crisis-management solutions lead to half-way, ineffective, and sometimes counterproductive results. The enormous and complex task of achieving democracy and the rule of law will require nothing less than a carefully thought-out, phased, long-term planning and implementation program for sustainable political development.

#### **The Discussion.**

One of the panelists observed that the Haitian crime problem should not be overstated, noting that there is more crime in one large U.S. city than in the entire country of Haiti. Another commented that one of the main reasons there are so few police in the countryside is that there is no infrastructure and thus no access. Still another speaker observed that sometimes the solutions to problems create new problems. He noted that the police are paid more than judges, who are required to have a higher education. He said that there was a need to strengthen the system of informal justice. This, in turn, brought a reply from another panelist that this might be fine for land disputes and commercial problems, but not for criminal cases. The most provocative comment, however, came from a member of the audience, who claimed that mob violence (especially land seizures) was increasing and that the government was encouraging this. Two panelists responded that he had overstated the problem. There had certainly been land seizures, but this was not the same thing as mob violence. Another participant noted the tendency of the United States to return Haitian criminals in the United States to Haiti, where they can become a violent, destabilizing force.

#### **Panel III**

##### **The United States and the International Community: Staying the Course**

Panelists generally acknowledged that, due in no small part to the involvement of the international community, much had been

accomplished in Haiti over the previous 30 months. Not only had the legitimate Haitian government been restored, but a national police force had been created, and several rounds of elections held. Political power had been peacefully transferred to a new administration and Congress, and the performances of both branches had been fairly impressive. Painful but necessary economic reforms had been passed into law, and hopefully this would serve to attract investment and stimulate the economy in the months ahead. Under the leadership of Presidents Aristide and Preval, moreover, there had been considerable progress toward replacing the traditional centralized, authoritarian, and exploitative state-society relationship with one based on government responsiveness and accountability.

Nevertheless, as the preceding panels amply demonstrated, enormous challenges were still ahead. Political institutions remain very weak, violent crime and human rights violations are on the rise, and the economy is still largely stagnant. Some 70 percent of the work force is unemployed. Consequently, the frustrations of ordinary Haitians are growing as popular expectations, raised to enormous heights in the aftermath of the September 1994 U.N./U.S. intervention, remain largely unfulfilled. The panelists agreed that, if these trends continue, they could lead to political turmoil and undermine the democratic experiment. Thus, the critical importance of the international community's willingness and ability to sustain its commitment to Haiti. Would it "stay the course"?

While there was a general consensus among the conference participants that the United States and the international community had to stay engaged in Haiti, varying perspectives emerged as to what this meant. One speaker argued that, regardless of whether or not you agreed with the Clinton administration's decision to intervene, once that decision was made the United States had an overriding interest that the policy not fail. Unfortunately, he noted, the policy had become a partisan football, which resulted in repeated interruptions in the delivery of aid and a consequent undermining of Haitian economic recovery.

Another speaker had a very different interpretation. He argued that the Clinton administration, having basically received what it wanted from Congress, lacked the will to press the Haitian government on human rights issues. The administration, he complained, wanted to claim success for its policies and had simply rationalized away or turned a blind eye to political violence. U.S. officials had been less than candid in their congressional testimony and had redacted documents in a misleading way. In this interpretation, "staying the course" meant continued impunity and obstruction of justice. While the United States must certainly stay engaged, he said that staying the course as it had been implemented thus far might actually

jeopardize the gains that had been made.

Picking up from these perspectives, panelists generally agreed that a positive commitment to Haiti's future presupposed more than just "staying the course." One warned that the United States must not do what it had done so often in the past--forget about the country as soon as the immediate crisis had passed. International actors should not be naive about the prospects for progress. There must be a long-term commitment. Moreover, the United States should not think of its involvement as a unilateral venture. It needed to involve other Western Hemisphere countries. Rather than encouraging Haitian politicians to come to Washington, he said, we should encourage them to go to places like Jamaica, which are more relevant to their situation and thus better models to learn from.

Given the international community's lead role in promoting "sustainable development," that issue was discussed at some length. One panelist defined it as the process by which a society changes to meet the basic human needs of its population, largely by its own efforts, over the long run. He emphasized that there is no universal model that can be applied to every society. The Marshall Plan worked well for Europe because the continent had strong institutions. Haiti, however, does not have that advantage. The paradox is that the more a society needs assistance, the more difficult it is to assist. This is the problem of absorptive capacity, a dilemma which affects both recipient and donor. The latter, in particular, must find effective approaches to this problem without riding roughshod over the intended beneficiaries.

The same panelist noted that the "Washington consensus" on structural adjustment works best when an attempt to build up civil society is incorporated into the approach. This is a slow process, however, and there is always a danger that the society will reject it. He recommended the adoption of a minimalist approach toward structural adjustment. Whereas some components of the strategy are universal and undisputable, others are more ideological and subject to debate. In Haiti, emphasis must be placed on institution-building and expectations management. Like others, he stressed the long-term nature of the economic reform process.

The same panelist suggested five lessons learned from the Haiti experience: First, massive U.N. involvement created the impression that solutions were just around the corner. This was an illusion. Second, at least in the Haitian case, when the going gets tough, it is the United States and Canada that are on the spot. Third, the most difficult part of international involvement may be cooperation in the justice area. Trying to coordinate different approaches favored by the key actors--the United States, France, and Canada--has been hard. All believe

their own system is best. Fourth, donor coordination is essential and must be improved. Fifth, the international community must be flexible enough to go to extraordinary lengths to meet Haitian needs, rather than always placing the burden on the Haitians to meet donor demands.

Another speaker, who addressed the U.S. military role in Haiti, stated that the economy is the most critical factor in maintaining stability and hope for the future. He noted that the U.S. military had made considerable contributions in this regard. Among other things, it had provided advisory teams in the Ministries of Justice, Public Works, and Finance. It was also training HNP mechanics and was confident that they would soon be able to provide an autonomous institutional capacity to maintain the force's motor pool. Through its humanitarian and engineering efforts, the U.S. Military Support Group had helped jump-start the infrastructure and raise Haitian living standards. Seventy-five medical exercises had reached out to 10,000 people. In light of fiscal pressures and other priorities, however, it had been recommended that the Support Group's presence be terminated. The speaker stressed that this did not mean that the U.S. military is abandoning Haiti. It will continue to stop by regularly and provide humanitarian assistance, as it does in other Caribbean nations. (Editor's note: In early June, 2 days after the Military Support Group's scheduled departure, it was announced that the mission would continue in Haiti on a temporary basis.)

Panelists focused generally on the challenge of planning and implementing a feasible, cooperative, and coordinated strategy for political stability and sustainable development. They saw the requirements of "constructive engagement" as going well beyond the past and current adhocism, to include:

- the need for a unified definition and vision of what ultimate success in Haiti will look like;
- the need for a small, unobtrusive multilateral organization to guide that vision to fruition; and,
- the need to develop Haitian political and technical competence to the point where Haitians will be able to take full responsibility for the oversight of their country's socioeconomic and political well-being.

Various speakers emphasized that Haiti's nascent and fragile democracy remains at risk. If international involvement is to make a difference, it must be appropriate to the country's needs and capacities, and adequately, consistently, and carefully designed in concert with Haitian involvement and a long-range vision. If the United States and the international community do not respond appropriately to the aspirations of Haitian citizens



for a legitimate, stable government, economic growth, and domestic security, there are likely to be major setbacks to the consolidation of democracy, including a possible breakdown in public order.

Ultimately, of course, Haitians have the primary responsibility for their own destiny. Even if the United States and the international community respond effectively, it will be Haitians who will determine whether that response takes root. Neither the United States nor the international community has the intellectual or political capability to "fix" Haiti. Even if they provided all the necessary resources--plant all the trees, generate full employment, eliminate disease and hunger--none of this would last without Haitian leadership and responsibility.

### **The Discussion.**

During the ensuing discussion, one of the panelists asserted that the Clinton administration, in its determination to declare U.S. policy a success, had politicized the Haiti issue. In the process, it had ignored very real problems, particularly in the area of human rights abuses, and withheld information from Congress. The speaker said that the United States should press the Haitian government to pursue the intellectual authors of the political killings that had occurred since the September 1994 intervention. In response, another panelist agreed that it was important to continue talking to the Haitian Government about these matters, preferably in private, but in public if necessary.

One panelist said that remaining obstacles holding up international aid must be removed. Specifically, the Haitian government must begin to implement the reforms required by IFIs. He added that the government must also pay its civil servants, many of whom have gone months without pay. A member of the audience observed that the Haitian government needed to make a dramatic signal that it was really committed to reform. That message, he said, had not yet gotten through. He commended a previous suggestion to privatize the Haitian customs service. In response, one of the panelists asked rhetorically: Privatize with which capital and which management? He noted that such an initiative could be very dangerous politically for the Preval government. Another panel member quickly remarked that reforms must have popular support or they will fail.

During the continued discussion, various participants again stressed the lack of communications within Haiti, due in part to the lack of a national communications network, and the need to develop a state regulatory capacity, especially a body of commercial law. In a concluding comment, one audience member underscored the importance of prioritizing policies and initiatives. While everything in Haiti needs fixing, not



everything can be fixed at the same time. You have to make choices. His first priority would be to address the food crisis. (At the time, a drought was threatening to produce famine in some parts of the country.)

#### CLOSING REMARKS

Recurring themes of the conference centered on the continuing need for almost universal reforms; the need to manage expectations among all actors; the need to assist Haitians to more effectively participate in political and economic decisionmaking processes; and the need for organized and integrated long-term outside involvement and support for sustainable development.

To address these needs, Haitian and international players must come to terms with significant challenges and as yet unanswered questions. Among those challenges are:

- the simultaneity of priorities that places suffocating pressures on Haiti's institutional capacities, stymies Haitian expectations, and overwhelms the international support system;
- the tensions between a development approach that advocates strengthening the central government versus an approach that advocates decentralizing power to heretofore nonexistent or weak local governments;
- the effective engagement of the private sector, especially as a complement to public sector efforts; and,
- the uncertainties surrounding the willingness and ability of the United States and the international community to sustain their involvement in the effort to achieve democracy, the rule of law, and socioeconomic development into the near and distant future.

Unanswered questions include:

- How much time do Haiti, the United States, and the international community have before unfulfilled expectations turn into serious political violence?
- What are Haitians learning about democracy as they are experiencing its application and mentoring by the United States and the international community?
- Within the context of externally imposed neoliberal economic reforms and continuing Haitian dependence on foreign aid, to what extent is Haiti able to assume and exercise sovereign responsibilities?

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